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Kennedy Exonerated

Ironie, isn't it? Richard Nixon had to write a book to find out that John F. Kennedy wasn't the unprincipled faker he thought he was.

Mr. Kennedy would indeed have been guilty of shoddy campaign tactics if he had, as Mr. Nixon believed, demanded sterner measures against Castro's Cuba knowing full well that an invasion already was being planned with the U. S. government's encouragement.

But now — after Mr. Nixon's indignation had been recorded in the nation's newspapers, in 6,680,000 copies of Life magazine and in the first edition of the Nixon book, "Six Crises"—it comes out that Mr. Kennedy had no advance knowledge of the invasion after all.

Mr. Nixon knew that his rival for the Presidency had been briefed by the Central Intelligence Agency in July and September of 1960. The CIA had been involved in the invasion planning since early in that year. So when Mr. Kennedy made a speech on Oct. 20 demanding "militant" policies against Castro, the Republican nominee reacted with righteous wrath.

"For the first and only time in the campaign," Mr. Nixon said in his book, "I got mad at Kennedy—personally."

Mr. Kennedy seemed to have bet on a horse race that had already been run. In addition he had perhaps jeopardized the invasion's success and forced his opponent to "go to the other extreme" — at least Mr. Nixon thought this was necessary at the time — and advocate a softer policy toward Castro than he really believed in.

Perhaps the greatest irony of all Mr. Nixon confided in his book, was that "the pro-Kennedy columnists

and editorial writers, for the one and only time in the campaign" gave him (Nixon) the better of the argument when he was arguing contrary to his convictions.

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The whole thing was a misunderstanding.

When Mr. Nixon's version of the campaign incident came out this week, the White House immediately denied that Mr. Kennedy had been told of the invasion plan before his Oct. 20, 1960, speech. This was promptly verified by Allen Dulles, retired director of CIA.

"The Cuban situation was of course dealt with in the briefings I gave Senator Kennedy," Dulles said. "The last briefing I gave him was over a month before the debate in which the issue arose. My briefings were intelligence briefings on the world situation. They did not cover our own government's plan or programs for action, overt or covert."

One can hardly blame Mr. Nixon for assuming that if the CIA briefed Mr. Kennedy on "the Cuban situation" in the Summer of 1960, it told him what it was planning to do about that situation. And if that assumption had been valid, Mr. Nixon's bitterness toward Mr. Kennedy would have been entirely warranted.

To the extent that others shared Mr. Nixon's misunderstanding of what really happened, the public airing of the incident serves a useful purpose. Beyond any possibility of doubt, the President stands exonerated.

While he may be embarrassed by his mistake, Mr. Nixon probably is as glad as any other American that the truth turns out to be to Mr. Kennedy's credit.